

Learners as Ethnographers: Developing Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC)

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Communicative Competence

What does the term 'communicative competence' mean to you? Try to come up with a definition

A brief history of communicative competence

- Models of communicative competence emerged in the 1970s & 1980s with the growing influence of sociolinguistics on the profession
- Dell Hymes (1972) argued for a shift away from Chomsky's abstract, ideal notions of native speaker competence, towards a focus on contextualised performance

“It is, if I may say so, rather a Garden of Eden view. Human life seems divided between grammatical competence, an ideal innately-derived sort of power, and performance, an exigency rather like the eating of the apple, thrusting the perfect speaker-hearer out into a fallen world. Of this world, where meaning may be won by the sweat of the brow, and communication is achieved in labor [...] little is said. The controlling image is of an abstract, isolated individual, almost an unmotivated cognitive mechanism, not, except incidentally, a person in a social world.” (Hymes 1972)



A brief history of communicative competence

- Hymes first coined the term 'communicative competence' to account for a speaker's knowledge of the language itself as well as his/her ability to **use** the language in a social context
- However, he was rather vague as to what the term actually meant, beyond a concern for what language is possible & appropriate in a given situation... it was left to other researchers in the 1980s & 1990s to refine the model into 5 components (e.g. Canale & Swain 1980)

Linguistic competence

A speaker's lexical, morphological, orthographical, syntactical & phonological knowledge of the language

Pragmalinguistic competence

A speaker's ability to understand or convey communicative intent appropriately in a given context (e.g. 難しいです vs. 無理です)

Sociopragmatic competence

A speaker's knowledge of what is socially or culturally appropriate in a particular speech community, including social conventions, taboo topics & non-verbal factors (e.g. social drinking Japan vs. UK)

Strategic competence

A speaker's ability to exploit verbal or non-verbal communication strategies to repair conversation:

1. Avoidance or reduction strategies (e.g. topic avoidance or message abandonment)
2. Compensatory strategies (e.g. circumlocution or mime)
3. Stalling strategies (e.g. hesitation devices or repetition)
4. Interactional strategies, exploiting the linguistic resources of our interlocutor (e.g. asking for repetition or clarification)

Discourse competence

A speaker's ability to produce unified, cohesive and coherent discourse in different genres (e.g. IMRAD structure of scientific papers; Swales' CARS model for research article introductions)

Create a Research Space (CARS)

- **Move 1:** Establishing a territory (claiming centrality; making topic generalizations; reviewing items of previous research)
- **Move 2:** Establishing a niche (counter-claiming; indicating a gap; question-raising; continuing a tradition)
- **Move 3:** Occupying the niche (outlining purposes; announcing present research; announcing principal findings; indicating RA structure)

(Swales 1990: 141)

Beyond the communicative competence model

“Instead of the assumption that learners should model themselves on ‘the native speaker’, it is becoming apparent to teachers and their learners that successful cross-cultural communication depends on the acquisition of abilities to understand different modes of thinking and living, as they are embodied in the language to be learnt, and to reconcile or mediate between different modes present in any specific interaction. This is not the ‘communicative competence’ on which people using the same, or closely related, cultures rely; it is an ‘intercultural communicative competence’” (ICC) (Byram & Fleming 1998: 12)

Discussion questions

- Can you see any advantages or problems with this expanded definition of communicative competence?
- What kinds of teachers are best placed to teach ICC?
- How can language teachers best develop learners' ICC?

Ethnography & participant observation

- Ethnography: “a qualitative method aimed to learn and understand cultural phenomena which reflect the knowledge and system of meanings guiding the life of a cultural group [...] Data collection is often done through participant observation” (Wikipedia)

Linking values to behaviour

- Directness
- External control
- Saving face
- Informality
- Indirectness
- Egalitarianism
- Use of understatement
- Asking people to call you by your first name
- Accepting without question that something cannot be changed
- Disagreeing openly with someone at a meeting
- Inviting the teaboy to eat lunch with you in your office
- At a meeting, agreeing with a suggestion you think is wrong

Ethnography & participant observation

- Participant observation: “Anthropologists are trained to use a research method known as ‘participant observation’, which essentially means participating in the life and culture of the people one is studying, to gain a true insider’s perspective on their customs and behaviour, while simultaneously observing them as a detached, objective scientist. Well, that’s the theory. In practice it often feels like that children’s game where you try to pat your head and rub your tummy at the same time.” (Fox 2004: 3)

Approaches through ethnography

- **Step 1:** Students begin by looking at their own worlds as social constructs, and are encouraged to see meaning and significance in the most ordinary & routine aspects of everyday life... making the familiar seem strange (e.g. the daily commute)
- **Step 2:** Students move beyond detailed observation & description to analysis and interpretation

(Barro, Jordan & Roberts, 1998)

Making the familiar seem strange

Unspoken rule = Not wearing pyjamas to work

Anthropologists would ask:

- Why are you changing your clothes?
- What would happen if you went to work in pyjamas?
- What else can't you wear to work?
- Do these rules apply to everyone at work?

(Fox 2004)

Making the familiar seem strange

- What are the 'unspoken rules' for riding on a commuter train in Japan?

Tampopo (Juzo Itami 1985)



LETTERBOX PRESENTATION

Tampopo: Analysis

- 'Settai' meeting (wining & dining) in a private room
- Use of position (President/Vice-President) in preference to names (Vardaman & Ideno 2007)
- 'Kamiza' (seat of honour) nearest the 'tokonoma' (alcove) & furthest from the door
- Hierarchical or 'vertical' society (Nakane 1970) and Japanese are highly rank-conscious (Tomita 1996)

Tampopo: Analysis

- “In everyday affairs a man who has no awareness of relative rank is not able to speak or even sit and eat. When speaking, he is expected always to be ready with differentiated, delicate degrees of honorific expressions appropriate to the rank order between himself and the person he addresses [...] In such contexts the English language is inadequate to supply appropriate equivalents. Behavior and language are intimately interwoven in Japan.” (Nakane 1970: 48)
- Advice for Japanese travelling abroad: “Except for inexpensive restaurants, the waiters and other personnel are professionals [...] Treat these people as equals. When you order, use the polite, ‘I’d like to have...’ rather than the brusque, arrogant ‘I want...’” (Vardaman & Ideno 2007).

Tampopo: Analysis

- Eye contact less frequent & threatening if excessive (Mitsuru 1996)
- 'Enryo' (reserve, constraint) is a cardinal principle of personal conduct in Japan
- Maintaining 'Wa' (harmony) particularly important
- High prestige value for some foreign cultures (particularly European countries)
- Levels of formality can be expressed lexically and syntactically (da, desu, de gozaimasu)

Participant observation projects

- Students can be asked to carry out their own participant observation projects: (i) Identifying the hidden rules of society through careful observation; (ii) Confirming rules by either following or breaking the rules; (iii) Interviewing informants (see Appendix 2)

Thank you

References

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